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OCI No.0792/65

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
29 March 1965

MEMORANDUM

Briefing Notes on the Soviet Leadership

1. Last week's meeting of the party central committee is a turning point in the development of the post-Khrushchev regime. First of all, the regime turned from what had for the most part been the reversal or negation of policies pushed by Khrushchev to the launching of a massive program of its own. Secondly, the plenum helped clarify the leadership situation, which up to now had been muddled by the regime's studied attempts to foster an image of collective leadership and also by the fact that Brezhnev was less in the public eye than the dictates of collectivity seemed to necessitate.

2. At last week's meeting Brezhnev stepped boldly into the limelight and took a firmer grip on the reins of power. By acting as spokesman for the first major new program of the regime, he has created the strongest impression of personal leadership since the fall of Khrushchev. Although the evidence is somewhat tenuous, his performance suggests that he, like Khrushchev before him, feels that the agricultural field can be made to yield the greatest political gains. Although the new program was undoubtedly worked out through the efforts of a large number of people, including several on the party presidium, it will be identified with Brezhnev and he will reap the political benefits of whatever popularity and success the program achieves. At this point the program seems likely to prove enormously popular with the agricultural population and bids fair to produce substantial improvements in agricultural production.

3. The size of the state expenditure required by the new program, with the means to be found "by redistribution within the state budget," indicates

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that Brezhnev has received some kind of mandate to make substantial reallocations of resources within the economy. Khrushchev, however, found that adoption of a program and its realization were two quite different things and Brezhnev, too, may fail to make the grade with this one. The fact that he has been willing to gamble his political career on a program so heavily dependent on touchy shifts in resource allocations, however, suggests that his mandate is a strong one and that he is confident of his ability to surmount any opposition arising from the military or the "metal-eater" blocs in the government.

4. The new program is clearly the product of long and careful preparation and coordination. It must have taken a fairly large slice of the time and attention of the top leaders during the past several months. It would seem that to have been done at all in that time required the existence of a broad consensus among the new leadership that sharp improvement in the agricultural sector was the most crucial domestic task facing them, and that it required drastic measures for its realization.

5. However, the personnel shifts announced at the session seem to bear little relationship to the main topic of the meeting. Because of their seeming lack of clear direction, there is a suggestion that in this area the leaders have been involved recently in horse trading and compromise. The most conspicuous promotion, that of Mazurov as full member of the party presidium and first deputy premier, involves a man of no clearly outstanding talents and with no administrative experience in Moscow to fit him for the job as Kosygin's chief assistant.

6. For nine years, Mazurov, age 51, has been stationed at Minsk as party leader of Belorussia and his record there seems to have been relatively undistinguished. During most of this time he was also a candidate presidium member but this appointment seemed related more to the policy of having a sprinkling of provincial leaders represented at the center than to any realization in Moscow that the man, himself, was of particularly high caliber. While it is possible that Mazurov has more to offer than the record would indicate, our net impression is that he was chosen mainly for his lack of ties to either Brezhnev, Kosygin, or Podgorny.

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7. The shift of Ustinov from the government to the party apparatus is less clear politically. During the past two years he was a first deputy premier but lacked the membership card in the party presidium which normally accompanies this rank. Now he has been given candidate status on the presidium and transferred to work as one of the nine party secretaries under Brezhnev. In effect, this means taking a man who because of past association and similarity of background seemed to be well suited as deputy to Kosygin, and bringing him head-on into a totally political milieu where he has had absolutely no experience. At this point, therefore, it would seem to be a toss-up whether Ustinov's transfer might indicate an effort to break up the Kosygin orientation in the government or whether it might suggest a continuation of the post-Khrushchev policy of bringing expert opinion closer to policy-making levels.

8. For most of his career, Ustinov, age 57, has been associated with Soviet military production, particularly the aircraft and missile industries. From 1941 to 1957, he was at first Minister of Armaments and later Minister of Armaments and Aircraft. He then became a deputy premier, probably to coordinate all defense related industry. For the past two years, while serving as a first deputy premier, he headed the Supreme Economic Council where he had coordinating responsibilities affecting all industry. He was probably chosen for this job because of his unusually good qualifications for acting as an arbitrator in disputes over resources.

9. Ustinov's experience along these lines raises the possibility that he has been given the task of finding the resources required for the new agricultural program. The leadership may believe that moving Ustinov into the party secretariat will provide him with greater authority for dealing with industry than he had while working on the government side of the house.

10. However, Ustinov's rather ambiguous status in the past--particularly his longstanding lack of high party rank--suggests that he is one of the more controversial figures near the top. Furthermore, he is entering the tough political environment of the secretariat where close familiarity with high party

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politics is more important than industrial expertise. In addition, if Ustinov is to be involved to a large extent in developing resources for the new program, we would have thought his chances for success might require full membership at the presidium level. The fact that he is only a candidate may prove to be a real disadvantage; this means that he is not allowed to participate when a vote in the presidium is needed. In sum, Ustinov seems to be still very much on trial.

11. In the other personnel changes, Vladimir Novikov takes over the Supreme Economic Council post vacated by Ustinov. Novikov is one of several officials who had been shunted aside by Khrushchev and now returned to prominence. He has worked with Ustinov in the Armaments Ministry and, like Ustinov, has past associations with Kosygin. From 1960 to 1963 Novikov was chairman of Gosplan and a deputy premier. That he was not made a first deputy premier in the shifts last week (Ustinov held this rank as head of the Supreme Economic Council) may be due to the fact that most of the defense oriented industries were recently removed from the jurisdiction of the council. The only other change was to confirm the ouster of Ilichev from the party secretariat. His removal leaves what appears to be a large void in the sphere of ideology and propaganda. There is no indication who may fill this slot.

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